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Kilassin For Hire

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A Tarasin scout explains how a hunting party on the trail of a ferocious pack of kilassin found a mystery instead. Cularin's great lizards are dangerous, but the fate of this particular pack makes the Tarasin worry even more. Find out what happened in our latest supplement to the Living Force campaign, a tie-in to the scenario "A Mon Alone."

The more "advanced" species of the galaxy have a romantic notion that goes something like this: Many species are not as technologically sophisticated as we have the pleasure to be. These less sophisticated species - - we will think of them as "primitive," without meaning any disrespect and without considering that any might be taken - - have their own subtle forms of art. They are often adept at weaving, for instance. They make fine pottery. They understand the ancient art of carving wood by hand. And they are mighty hunters. For many such species, hunting is not only an art, but a religion.

This romantic notion has been applied by some, quite mistakenly, to the tarasin, Cularin's surviving indigenous intelligent species. It takes only a short search of the holonets to turn up academic papers relating the tarasin hunting practice to everything from fertility rites to Sith worship to a complicated form of dance.

None of these papers, unfortunately, seem to have been written by anyone who's ever been to Cularin for more than a month. While it is certainly the case that tarasin hunting parties are often so regimented as to seem ritualized, the simple truth is that without tight control over the process, the hunter will become the hunted. The kilassin, great reptiles that inhabit Cularin's jungles, are nothing to be trifled with. Without a precise plan of attack, tarasin who find themselves hunting a herd of kilassin almost invariably end up as a somewhat twitchy meal.

The hunt is much simpler than what self-important academics make it out to be. It isn't art, and it isn't worship. It's survival. And if there's one thing survivors understand, it's when something has gone wrong.

What follows is a journal recorded by a traveler in the jungles of Cularin. It is presented here to help others better understand the nature of the tarasin hunt, and it chronicles a situation in which a hunt came to an unplanned conclusion. A translation from the Tarasinese will be displayed as the narration progresses.

There were at least eleven kilassin. That is what we decided, though their tracks ran back upon themselves and their spoor piled one creature's atop the next. If they were more intelligent, I might have thought them to be

attempting to hide their numbers. But they are no more intelligent than a Caarite is tall, and no more subtle than - - well, than a Caarite. They tromped through the jungle with such force that I began to believe Cloud Mountain might awaken. I stayed far enough behind that they would not notice me, and I shifted my position as the wind shifted.

I was the advance scout [this is the closest translation available of the Tarasinese phrase no'oma k'bri, but it fails to capture the full flavor of the phrase; it also implies a certain level of honor at being the lead tracker, though contextual cues indicate that being the no'oma k'bri may sometimes (though not always) be a form of punishment]. I had seen this pack of kilassin before, I believed. There was one, a small one with the cruel claws, whose track was very distinct. One of his claws was missing, so that he left only a partial hindfoot print wherever he stepped, and he rolled that foot more than others of his kind, to keep his balance. So I had seen these tracks, with this pack, in the past. They had never moved like this before.

I knew from the tracks, from the moistness of the sap on the broken branches and from the fresh stench of their leavings, that they couldn't be more than an hour, maybe two, ahead of me. This is as close as most hunting parties come, until we push into the midst of the pack itself. Kilassin move slowly enough that if you allow yourself to become any closer than this before you are ready, you may find yourself walking into their midst after they stopped for a nap. A stream, or even a shady stand of trees, can stop a pack of kilassin suddenly, and lead the hunter who believes himself to have a good deal of space between himself and the great lizards into a costly error.

Had they been moving deeper into the jungle, I might have ignored them. They had two hours on me, and I had one hour on dusk, and if there is a time when I am less interested in actually finding a pack of kilassin, it is after nightfall. But they were moving toward one of the irstat, and I needed to stay with them, to push, since while most kilassin will not stray too close to an irstat, this herd was not behaving like most.

I called back to the others, signaling that we needed to hurry. They knew the route as well as I, and their response told me that they understood the danger. I began a half-jog, which is normally discouraged for an advance scout. If we get too far ahead, the remainder of the hunting party may not find us in time. But I believed myself to be far enough behind the kilassin that I could not possibly overtake them without having the rest of my party nearby.

The other difficulty in moving quickly while hunting is that one misses subtle signals. This is more true when the quarry is moving in an illogical or atypical manner. The challenge with these kilassin is that - - intentionally or not - - they were hiding their numbers. I followed the mish-mish of tracks, which remained a mish-mish as my eyes flashed across them. Carelessly.

Twenty minutes later, the first kilassin came at me from a stand of trees.

It was a small creature, but vicious. It had thick forelimbs and daggers for claws, and it reared up as it came at me, ready to cut me into small pieces.

The weakness of these kilassin, though, is their strength. They lack flexibility. They are fast and can maneuver quickly, but their limbs are thick and meaty. When one rears at you, the best thing to do is move inside the reach of its claws and hope that it doesn't think to fall atop you.

This is what I did. It ran at me, ready to rend flesh. I ran at it, trying to keep my flesh whole. I felt the air slice open as its claws passed my head - - one to either side of my well-retracted fan - - and then I was pressing my face against its smooth underbelly. It stank of vorgrhis leaves and sour water.

It roared its anger, and I shoved with my shoulders, knowing I must keep it off balance to the rear for a few seconds more. My hands found the vibroblades at my belt. I do not remember stabbing the creature. I do remember gouts of red staining my arms to the elbows and the rattling death-croak the thing belched at me before it lay still.

It was very difficult to get one of my vibroblades out of its belly. I almost left it. My fear was that the rest of the herd might be nearby, and that I would do better to have one weapon in my hand and one stuck in the creature's gut than to be attacked by another kilassin while trying to pry the blade loose. But it came free with my last yank, and I was glad. It is a good blade.

I straightened and spun, expecting more creatures to come from the treeline. They did not. I cleaned my blades and hurried on, knowing that the rest of the party would mark the body - - if they saw it as worth marking - - and follow soon. I could not hear them, but I knew they must be near. When you work as closely together as we do, you begin to sense things about one another. Had they been further behind, I might have slowed my pace. But they were there, a half-kilometer or so to my rear, and the pack of kilassin was ahead of me, still moving toward the irstat.

The best thing about following a herd of kilassin is that they are not subtle. Generally, you do not have to clear away branches or dodge around prickly underbrush. The kilassin have cleared a path for you. So I ran, not quite so quickly as before, and with a bit more caution. Being ambushed once as dusk was beginning to settle its gray mist beneath the spreading branches of the k'flua trees was enough for one evening.

Ahead of me, I knew there was a clearing, and from that clearing a path would lead the kilassin directly to the village. Signs said I was a half-hour behind them now, and that clearing would be a half-hour from the village, perhaps a little longer as day fell and night arose. For the sake of the irstat, I could not be cautious, so I signaled to my companions - - the whistle of the blue-beaked akcinor - - and I ran. I would catch the kilassin and turn them aside, or I would make my way to the irstat first and warn them, get them clear.

I came to the clearing and ran across to the path on the far side. Within seconds, I stopped. The path was thick with branches and vines, and the tall grasses to either side whispered and waved in the night's soft wind. The kilassin had not been through here.

Confused, I returned to the clearing and searched. The tracks led into

the clearing, but they did not lead out. The kilassin had arrived at this place, had milled about - - it looked as though two of them had lain down - - and then they were gone.

I have hunted kilassin for years. I am very well acquainted with what they can and cannot do. These kilassin did not leave of their own accord. They were taken.

As to who would take kilassin, or why - - I wish that I knew.